

THINK ABOUT IT ... Find the answers in the lesson:

1. The name “Theotokos” means:

2. In icons of the Theotokos, she holds the Christ Child next to her heart. What does this show us about how Christ and the Theotokos feel toward us?

3. In the troparia (hymn), the Church says that through the Theotokos “heaven and earth met.” This means that “heaven” came to us because Christ is _____.

4. What does the word “sorrow” mean?

5. How can we show that we “love God”?

6. What are some of the ways that we are to “love our neighbor”?

7. The Theotokos helps us by _____ for us.

8. The Theotokos helps us because she _____ us.

The Theotokos (Mother of God) Our Helper and Protector



“O Holy Theotokos, pray unto God for us.”

WHO IS THE THEOTOKOS? HOW DOES SHE HELP US?

“**Theotokos**” is a Greek word that means “**Mother of God**.” It is the Orthodox word that describes the Virgin Mary.

In the city of Pskov (a city in Russia) there is a monastery called the Pskov Caves Monastery. That monastery has a special icon of the Theotokos. She holds the Christ child in her arms so that His right side is **next to her heart**. And Christ, in turn, hug her neck. In this way, both the Theotokos and Christ show us their **tenderness, comfort, and love**.

We know the story about the Nativity of Christ (Christmas.) The Theotokos brought love to us by giving birth to Christ.

One of the troparia (hymns) of the Orthodox Church says to us that in the Theotokos, “heaven and earth met” when she accepted to become the mother of Christ. That means that through her **heaven was brought to us by Christ** -- “heaven” because Christ is God, and “earth” because He was born “in the flesh” through her. That means that, through her, Christ God had a body, just like we do.

Christ was born as a child, and the Theotokos took care of Him while He was growing up. She knew who her Son is and what would happen to Him when he grew up. She had heard, on the fortieth day after Christ’s birth, the words of **Saint Simeon**: “a sword shall pierce your own soul.” (Luke 2:35). The “sword” is a symbol of the sorrow (a word that means sadness) that she would feel when she would later see her Son, Jesus, die on the Cross.

He will say to her many years later, “Do not cry for me, Mother, when you see me in the tomb. Because I, your Son, whom you conceived in your womb without seed, will rise from the dead and be glorified.” (Odion 6, from the Great Saturday Canon). This reminds us that although Christ died on the Cross (commemorated on Good Friday), **we rejoice with the Theotokos** on the day of Christ’s Resurrection (Pascha). It all became possible because of her love for God. Christ died upon the cross and rose from the dead to make it possible for us to have **Eternal Life** with Him in Heaven.

When the people of Pskov **prayed to the Theotokos** while standing before her icon, she protected the city and the monastery in that city. She first protected them from an invading army in 1581. She protected the city and monastery again in 1812 during the invasion by Napoleon, a ruler of France.

Just as she held the Christ child in her arms giving Him all her love and comfort, **the Theotokos loves everyone who loves Christ**, just as God the Father loves us. Christ tells us this, “for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.” (John 16:27)

The Theotokos, by her example of love, teaches us to also treat one another with kindness and love. What does she want us to understand about kindness?

Kindness is not weakness. Kindness shows **the strength of love**. Christ teaches and commands us to love God and all people: “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.**” (Gospel of Luke 10:27)

What does the quotation mean? **What does Christ want us to do?**

First, we are told to **love God. We do this by:**

- * knowing and paying attention to His Commandments,
- * feeling sorry when we do something wrong (a sin),
- * going to Confession about the mistakes we made,
- * and most important: trying to do better next time.

Next, we are told to **love our neighbors**. Our neighbors are ALL people, not only the persons who live next door to us. Our love for other people is shown **when we:**

- * never do anything to hurt anyone,
- * never make fun of anyone,
- * never say mean things to anyone,
- * be kind to people, even if they are not kind to us,
- * forgive people who do mean things,
- * help people who have less than we have,
- * pray for all people: both our friends and those who don’t want be.

So how does the Theotokos help us with all of this? The Theotokos is our greatest **intercessor** and our protector. **That means that she prays for us**. She helps us learn to be kind, because she is kind. Pray to her and ask her to help you. She always hears everyone who prays for her intercession (her prayers to God to help us). She prays for us when we are sick. She prays for us when we feel sad.

She prays for us in all things that we ask for help. She does this because of love.